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| TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF |

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| Custody, divorce, and family law cases are extremely stressful. Numerous studies have shown that the two most stressful events in a person’s life are divorce and the death of a spouse, far outweighing events such as the birth of a child, being fired, moving out of state, and getting married. (Separation after a long term relationship where you have had children also raises many of these issues.)During the divorce process, you need to focus on being good to yourself and taking care of yourself.  Following is advice that often helps people who are going through a divorce, or the end of a relationship with children.  The BasicsYour first order of business is to take care of yourself. Eat. Sleep. Spend time with other people. During this process, you need to take care of your emotional needs. You would be there for a friend who is going through a divorce. You need to allow your friends to be there for you. An excellent book that Mr. Robbins has found to be very helpful is called "How to Survive the Loss of a Love."  He stocks this book in his office and has given away over a thousand of copies of it. If you are in his office, he will likely offer you a copy of it. You can read this book from cover to cover in one night.  He recommends that you read it once a week for the first few weeks and again monthly as you grow through this experience.  Mr. Robbins found that he took away something different every time that he read it.The good news is that the stress of going through a divorce will lessen over time. Your job is to take care of yourself during this process.See a Doctor and maybe a CounselorMr. Robbins suggests that you see a doctor for a full, physical exam. If you have a medical problem, you need to know it now, so you can make the best plans for your future. Also, if you discover a medical problem now, you may be able to ask for spousal maintenance, or have a defense against paying spousal maintenance. Your doctor may recommend that you take vitamins, eat more wholesome food, get more sleep, or even take prescribed medication. Follow your doctor’s recommendations. This is also an excellent time for you to consider going to a counselor. You are going through a tough time. You can use all of the support that you can get. Some clients are afraid that going to a counselor will be used against them. Actually, Mr. Robbins has found the opposite to be true. Going to counseling is usually seen as a sign of strength by the Court. Indeed, he has seen many cases where a counselor has testified as to how a parent has embraced counseling to address issues in their lives, and this testimony was taken very, very seriously by the Court.This could also be a good time to join a church. Seeking to connect with a power greater than yourself can make a world of difference right now. If you are already active in a church, consider asking for pastoral counseling with your minister, priest, or rabbi.Perhaps you are considering suicide. Suicide is a permanent solution for a temporary problem. If you are even thinking of suicide, you need to get help from a doctor or counselor as soon as possible. Mr. Robbins has had clients who were on the brink, but then were able to get through the process when they asked for help. If you are thinking of harming yourself, go to the hospital. At a minimum, call 911 immediately. Trained people can help you get through this difficult time.Drugs and AlcoholDivorce can be incredibly painful. It may be very tempting to cover your pain with drugs or alcohol. However, that pain will still be there once you stop self-medicating, and often life becomes more complicated when recreational drugs or alcohol are involved. Other than medication prescribed by a physician, Mr. Robbins recommends that you not use other substances to alter your consciousness or soothe your emotions. Instead, seek support from family, friends, a counselor, a physician (for medication) and a minister or other spiritual resources. If you have children, this recommendation is even more important. Journaling, meditation, prayer, and physical exercise are much more effective alternatives to deal with the emotional pain.ChildrenIf you have any children, including children who are already adults, it is essential that you keep them out of your divorce.While you have been hurt by your spouse's words and actions, your children usually still love your spouse. When you say negative things about your spouse, this usually causes children great conflict and often leads them to blaming themselves. You are the adult; let your children be children.If you have young children, they are probably very confused and scared by what is going on. A good book to read to younger children is “It’s Not Your Fault, Koko Bear” Mr. Robbins stocks this book in his office and has given away hundreds of copies it. FriendsYou might find that couples who know both you and your spouse are reluctant to be as supportive as they would otherwise be, such as if you or your spouse were facing a health crisis. This is true for a variety of reasons. (1) You going through a divorce might be upsetting to them, leading them to question the strength of their own marriages. (2) They might want to avoid taking sides. (3) They might feel unable to be of any help.If you find that a couple you know is pulling back, Mr. Robbins recommends that you look to other people for emotional support. Just because a particular couple is reluctant to support you does not mean that everyone is reluctant to support you.Many people have lots of advice for friends who are going through a divorce.  Mr. Robbins has found that often their advice is more about them than it is about you.  He recommends that you take their advice with a big grain of salt, while accepting and appreciating their concern for you.Your SpouseBoth you and your spouse thought that your marriage would last; otherwise, you wouldn’t have gotten married. For now, Mr. Robbins encourages you to not focus on your spouse; instead focus on yourself and what you can do for yourself, with the support of friends. You need to be able to stand your ground, while having compassion for your spouse. ConclusionAgain, Mr. Robbins cannot emphasize enough that this is a time for you to take care of yourself and to get support for yourself. Researchers suggest that people dealing with such a life-changing loss such as divorces will go through a range of reactions, from shock to bargaining to depression to anger to acceptance, in no particular order, and will many times cycle through these emotions rapidly, sometimes over one or another emotion. Your job is to go from surviving, to healing, to growing. You need to take one day at a time and maybe even one breath at a time. Be kind to yourself and gentle to others. This passage will end. You will survive. You will heal. You will love again. |
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